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A

S E R M O N

SUITABLE TO THE TIMES,

PREACHED AT

ST. MARY'S, OXFORD,

On SUNDAY the 18th of November;

A T

ST. MARTIN'S,

On SUNDAY the 25th;

AND AT

ST. PETER'S IN THE EAST,

On SUNDAY the 2d of December.

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RECTOR OF LINCOLN COLLEGE.

THE SECOND EDITION.

L O N D O N :

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I JOHN, iv. 1.

*Beloved, believe not every Spirit ; but try the Spirits,
whether they are of God.*

THE Religion, by which alone our Salvation is to be obtained, is altogether a reasonable service. Its divine Author challenged his Jewish hearers to the exercise of their understanding in its first reception ; “ and why even of yourselves judge “ ye not what is right ? ” And his illustrious Apostle Paul has given a command to Christians in general to “ prove all things, and to hold fast that “ which is good.” And, without multiplying authorities, the same is the liberal and universal language of holy Scripture, by which all characters and descriptions, all orders and degrees, of men are called to the exercise of their own judgment in the business of their salvation ; according to their capacities whether small or great ; according to their opportunities whether contracted or enlarged ; and according to the means of judging, whatever they may be, which they enjoy.

B

Upon

Upon this view of our Religion a question arises of no common magnitude—In what does this general duty of judging for themselves, which is incumbent upon all men, principally consist? for the same great Apostle who hath commanded men “to prove all things,” hath also informed us, that “great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh; justified in the Spirit; seen of Angels; preached to the Gentiles; believed on in the World; received unto Glory:” And the book, in which these mysteries are disclosed to men, is a book of great antiquity, of supernatural authority, written in learned languages, and in a style in many parts almost as mysterious as the subjects of which it treats. In matters of such deep concern and difficult inquiry, how are all men enabled to judge for themselves? From the nature of society in which they are placed, they are divided into different ranks, and distributed into various offices, of life: and, by their respective employments and occupations, they are almost as different in character as they are in person. Various are their abilities by the gift of nature, various are their opportunities of improvement by the will of Providence, and different must be their grounds of judging: yet Salvation is the gift of Heaven which is made common to them all.

In this unequal division of things necessary to the existence of the human race, it is clearly the design of the Author of our Salvation, that they
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who are possessed of weaker understandings, that they whose minds are less improved, and that they who are employed in the lower but useful offices of life, should receive religious instruction from others who have greater opportunities to know, and are better qualified to judge; though the information of the wisest is not now infallible. And it is, accordingly, the glory of the Christian Faith, that mixed and exalted virtue which is the only means of our Salvation, that it requires not information that is direct, conviction that is immediate, nor the first degrees of knowledge: but, that it can ever grow from a second-hand information and out of a weaker conviction, as its proper soil; provided the heart of the believer be pure and well-disposed.

Accordingly, as many were to be taught, many have professed to teach. The qualifications of a teacher are, ability of head and integrity of heart; for to infallibility he does not pretend: those of a learner are docility and obedience; but not without the exercise of his own judgment according to his power. In matters, therefore, of the last importance to their salvation, in which they must depend on the ability and integrity of others, the great and general duty of Christians at large, is to judge for themselves of these qualities in their teachers, by those means of judgment which they possess. And this is that important duty which St. John hath enforced upon all Chris-

tians by the admonition in the text : “ Beloved, believe not every Spirit ; but try the Spirits, whether they are of God.”

What the beloved Apostle here meant by *Spirits* is evident from the words which follow : “ Because,” says he, “ many false Prophets are gone out into the world.” A *Prophet*, in the general language of Scripture, is a teacher of religious truth ; of whom Christ was the first and the fountain of all, being possessed of the “ Spirit without measure,” who is the principle of all religious teachers : on which account other teachers, however partially possessed, are called “ Spirits” in the text. After him his Apostles were “ *Prophets*” endued with extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, “ the Lord working with them, and “ confirming their doctrine with signs following.” But, however infallible their doctrine, and however confirmed by supernatural authority, the Spirit of Antichrist, which they foretold would infest the Church in future times, “ was even then “ in the world.” Ever ready to check the progress of a religion which would destroy his power, the Prince of this world had put in commission his agents and evil spirits, under different forms of imposition, even before the divine authority was withdrawn by which the Christian Religion was planted. These evil spirits were false prophets and false teachers, who, by the introduction of
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lies and heresies, corrupted the purity and simplicity of the Christian Faith. In opposition to each other, as the friends of error will ever be, whilst some contended for justification by works alone, others maintained the all-sufficiency of a dead inactive faith. Some were opposers of legal government, and spoke evil of dignities: others scoffed at the mysteries of religion, and scandalized things which they did not understand.

And if, in these early ages of the Church, the Spirit of Antichrist broke out in false prophets and false teachers, we cannot wonder that it should infest the world with similar evils in these distant times, teaching for doctrines the "inventions of men," and "undermining the faith once delivered to the saints." Prophecy warns us of false teachers in every age: and the Apostle's admonition to "try the spirits" is applicable in all times; and particularly in this age and nation.

To us "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God:" and, in the midst of so many kinds of religious teachers, who, of different persuasions and with different views, profess to teach, the general duty of every Christian among us, and the first step towards a sound and saving faith, is to judge for himself both of the *Ability* and of the *Integrity* of his teachers, by those means or rules of judging, which Providence, in her wisdom, hath afforded him.

I. And, in regard to the ABILITY of his teachers, there is a rule, by which every one may judge for himself, founded in his own experience and applied by common-sense. However low he may be in the ranks of society, and however mean in his employment, every man must have some trade or occupation by which he earns his bread; or he deserves to have no bread at all. To the exercise of that trade or occupation self-experience must convince him, that some degree of learning however humble, some kind of practice however vulgar, is required. He must have observed, that, to learn the art or business of a common trade, by the wise regulations of society, men are bound to an apprenticeship of seven years: and, if he will only carry this self-experience and observation from one thing to another, a little common-sense will enable him to conclude, that the profession of Divinity must require much time and study, before men are qualified to teach and to instruct others in the great duties and mysteries of Religion. From the way of life, therefore, in which they, who profess to be teachers, have been bred and educated; from the opportunities they have enjoyed of receiving religious instruction; and from the years they have spent in the study of languages, sciences, and other necessary parts of learning, every one is enabled to judge for himself, without any depth of reasoning, who are best qualified to be teachers in one of the most difficult and learned of all professions.

fions. From his own experience and observation he may conclude, that whoever, without these opportunities and these studies, pretends to be a teacher of religion, is merely a pretender: that he is either an enthusiast who deceives himself, whom he may pity; or an impostor who would deceive him, whom he should despise; and, consequently, that he is not one of the Spirits that are of God.

Convinced of their necessity, the wisdom of our government has accordingly provided schools and places of learning for the regular qualification of men who are to be called by due authority to be the ministers of the national church, which it justly considers as the support and bulwark of the state. From these schools and places of learning the body of the clergy are supplied, who, according to forms and offices which are purely scriptural, preside over the public worship, interpreting the Scriptures, which are the word of God, with great openness of conduct, and directing the minds and consciences of their hearers with great simplicity of heart. So qualified and so disposed are the appointed ministers of the Church, to whose instructions and assistance in their spiritual concerns, the people of this country have easy and free access: and, so far as their learning and qualifications go, they are "no deceivers but true men;" who may therefore be supposed to be actuated by the Spirit of God.

But, whatever our advantages may be, however qualified to instruct you, or however willing, we do not force ourselves upon the people, nor are we forced upon you by the civil power. Ye are left to your own free choice and determination to be saved by whom ye will, and, according to the vulgar expression, in your own way: for “we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the “Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ “sake.” Of necessity ye must be taught by some; and all we require is, that ye will do yourselves justice by discharging this great duty of judging for yourselves with sincerity and discretion; that, in regard to our learning and qualifications, ye will try us by the same plain rule ye try other men in their occupations and professions—from the opportunities we have had, and the application we have made; and that, so far as relates to our ABILITY as teachers, and our labours in our profession, “every man will so account of us, as of “the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the “mysteries of God.”

This rule is of easy and obvious application: and it is with amazement and concern that we see it so much neglected and overlooked by the inhabitants of this place, where, of all others, it is the most obvious. They enjoy a singular opportunity of judging for themselves, by being eye-witnesses of the many years we devote to deep and important studies, to qualify ourselves for our
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sacred and sublime profession. They bear witness to the expences which we incur in the prosecution of these studies; and they experience the advantage of these expences. They may have heard of the many lectures in Divinity which are read in this University, both public and private. Daily and hourly they behold those magnificent libraries, built by the generosity of founders and others, for the benefit of our studies. But, notwithstanding these opportunities of trying us by this rule, and notwithstanding there are more than a dozen parish-churches, built by the piety of their forefathers, in which we are ready to instruct them to the utmost of our power, we see many of them led away, with the wildest infatuation and with itching ears, by ignorant and itinerant teachers of every denomination, ~~by Methodists and Enthusiasts, by Anabaptists and Dissenters,~~ of whose learning and abilities they have not had the smallest proof; men who are self-taught without the power, and self-ordained without even the appearance, of learning; men out of the meanest professions and lowest occupations of life; whom, if they had a fair opportunity of trying, they would find more ignorant and unqualified than themselves.—“Blind leaders of
“the blind.”

2. After the Ability of spiritual teachers it is necessary to try their INTEGRITY, by such plain and easy rules as every one may apply.

Some

Some of these teachers, however ignorant, have the art to persuade their hearers, that their greater sanctity has called down from heaven a greater degree of illumination, which sets all learning at defiance, and holds all science in contempt: and, in addition to this delusion of superior light, they put on a sanctity of character and a formality of devotion superior to those of the more intelligent and duly educated ministers of the Gospel. But, as neither we nor ye are sensible of any extraordinary gifts or special illumination, as none of us feel ourselves much wiser or much better than our neighbours; let us withhold our admiration of these wondrous men, whilst we judge of them by such plain rules of Scripture (which we believe is “the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world”) as the meanest understanding may apply, and by which we may be able to determine whether they are of God.

“Beware of false prophets,” saith our Lord himself, “which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit: a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit — wherefore by their *fruits* ye shall know them.”

This

This scripture-rule, by which we are to judge, is plain in itself, plain in its illustration, and as plain in its application.

To judge of the secret springs and principles of the heart, and of those motives which lie buried within the breast, is indeed a difficult and a delicate task: but, when the Founder of our salvation, who was himself the searcher of hearts, has fore-warned his Church to beware of false teachers, and has given us the rule by which they are to be tried; to apply that rule is a solemn duty of religion, in obedience to that command.

What these *fruits* are, by which we are directed to try the Spirits of men, both good and evil, as by the stream we trace the fountain, whether bitter or sweet, from which it flows, Scripture, that infallible rule of judging, has accordingly informed us. “The fruit of the Spirit is *Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, Temperance*: but the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: *Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Heresies, and the like.*”

This scripture-rule, so authorized and so explained, let us apply to ourselves in these present times.

Under all the blessings of an excellent Constitution in Church and State, we are famed for a happy nation; and, in spite of artful and treacherous impostors who would persuade us otherwise,

wise, we feel ourselves a happy nation. We are united together by the bonds of *Love*, which some disaffected teachers labour to dissolve; by the love of our King, whom they labour to despise; by the love of our Country, which they labour to destroy; and by the love of each other as members of the same Government, which they labour to overturn. And, as we are united by mutual love, our hearts are enlivened with national and universal *Joy*, which they are labouring to turn into scenes of sorrow. We have *Peace* within our walls, which they would have us to change for civil-war accompanied with horrors at which our blood runs cold: and we have *Plenteousness* within our palaces and houses, which they would convert into abject poverty. We are renowned as a magnanimous and loyal people, patient and *Long-suffering* under all those dangers and misfortunes, which, at one time or other, every nation must contend with; full of that *Gentleness* and *Goodness* towards our enemies, which are the proofs of an holy *Faith*: whilst our *Meekness* and *Temperance* under public disaffection, and the most outrageous calumny, are the certain signs of our national courage.—These are the virtues, however, which the ministers of the established Church enforce upon their hearers with an openness becoming the sincerity of their character, and with an earnestness becoming the dignity of their office. These are the *fruits* which they bear, in their conduct

duct and behaviour, with honesty and without ostentation, and by which they request to be tried : for, knowing “ that God is righteous,” they know that “ every one that doeth righteousness is born “ of him.”

On the contrary, my brethren, whoever be those teachers, who, under the appearance of religion, would disturb our happiness in this world by undermining the Church which is apostolical, or the State which is so admirably constituted ; whoever, instead of the Love of our King, of our Country, and of each other, are labouring to promote *Hatred, Variance, Emulations* ; whoever, in the place of Joy and Peace, would bring in *Wrath and Strife* ; whoever, instead of a Catholic Faith uniformly professed, would introduce *Heresies and Schisms* ; whoever, in the place of *Long-suffering* and Obedience to the powers which are ordained of God, which he has commanded us to obey, would introduce *Sedition and Rebellion* : “ Ye shall know them by “ their *fruits*”—They are not the Spirits which are of God : “ They are earthly, sensual, devilish. “ Though they may come to you in sheep’s “ clothing ; yet inwardly they are ravening “ wolves.”

3. But, there is a Spirit abroad in this land, which would not only deprive you of your happiness in this world, but bereave you of your hope in the next,

next, still more opposite to the Spirit of God. This evil spirit was foretold by the beloved Apostle; who has given us the rule by which it is to be tried, in the words immediately following the verse of the text. "Hereby know ye the Spirit
 " of God: Every Spirit that confesseth that *Jesus*
 " *Christ is come in the flesh* is of God: and every
 " Spirit that confesseth *not* that Jesus Christ is
 " come in the flesh is not of God. And this is
 " that Spirit of Antichrist whereof ye have heard
 " that it should come." And the same Spirit he hath more fully described in the following words:
 " Who is a liar, but he that denieth that *Jesus is*
 " *the Christ*? He is Antichrist that *denieth the*
 " *Father and the Son*:" which animated language of St. John is thus illustrated by St. Paul:
 " Wherefore, I give you to understand that no
 " man, speaking by the Spirit of God, calleth
 " *Jesus accursed*; and that no man can say that
 " *Jesus is the Lord*, but by the Holy Ghost."—
 How far some of our modern teachers out of the Church partake of this Spirit, I will leave to your own impartial judgment, after informing you, that they vilify and blaspheme the dignity, and divinity of Him, who is the Author of our salvation; who is called in Scripture "My Lord and
 " my God;" who, in the same sentence in which he is declared to be the "Son of God come in the
 " flesh," is also declared to be "the true God and
 " eternal

“ eternal Life ;” who, after the affirmation of the Old Testament, that “ The Lord our God is One “ God,” hath himself declared “ I and my Father “ are One ;” whose “ Name is above every name ;” whom “ all men are” commanded “ to honour “ even as they honour the Father ;” and who, in the enjoyment of this honour, entertained the worship and adoration of men and angels, after having himself declared, “ Thou shalt worship the Lord “ thy God, and him only shalt thou serve ;” which worship was rejected with abhorrence by two of his inspired Apostles, St. Peter and St. Barnabas—I say, after reminding you of these scripture-truths, I will leave you to judge for yourselves of the Spirit of those teachers, who would degrade Him to a mere man, very little superior to some other men.— Is not this to deny that *Jesus is the Lord*, in the scriptural meaning of the word *Lord*—“ the Lord of “ heaven and earth ?” Is not this to deny that *Jesus is the Christ*, who, by that name, was anointed our eternal King ? Is not this to call *Jesus accursed*, who is declared to be “ Blessed for evermore ?” And, is not this to “ *deny both the Father and the Son ?* “ for whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not “ the Father.” And is not this to “ *dishonour both “ the Father and the Son ?* for he that honoureth “ not the Son, honoureth not the Father who hath “ sent him.” And, is not this, in substance and in effect, to deny that “ *Jesus Christ*,” that blessed
and

and eternal Spirit, "*is come in the flesh*," which St. John hath declared "to be of the Spirit of Antichrist, and not of God?"

The conduct, my brethren, which will secure your happiness both in this world and in the next, is prescribed in one short command of holy Scripture—"Fear God, and honour the King;" by which **LOYALTY** and **RELIGION** are coupled together, forming one great compounded virtue. To this great command the different Spirits of which I have been warning you directly oppose themselves; and they are uniformly and almost inseparably coupled together, forming one great compounded vice: for, we have the experience of every age and country to inform us, that libertines in politics are libertines in religion, and that the enemies of good Government are always they who are without God in the world.

These teachers would dissuade you, by artful and enticing words, both from the fear of God and the honour of the King: but, when your happiness both in this world and in the next is so much concerned, before ye attend to what they teach, it becomes you, my beloved, to try what spirit they are of; as to their **ABILITY** by your own *experience* in similar cases; and, as to their **INTEGRITY** by the *fruits* which they produce. From their principles and actions, not from their professions, ye shall know them; for if they be false-teachers, the

Apostle

Apostle tells us they are “deceivers,” who are only to be proved by their actions and intentions; and, if they labour to destroy your happiness here and your hope hereafter, they are not of God.—
 “Little children, let no man deceive you: Fear
 “God and honour the KING: He that doeth
 “righteousness is only righteous, even as God is
 “righteous.”

F I N I S.

LATELY PUBLISHED,
 BY THE SAME AUTHOR,
 TWO LETTERS TO MR. BURKE
 ON POLITICS:
 AND
 A SERMON, SUITABLE TO THE TIMES,
 PREACHED ON THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER.

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